

Canyon county zoning ordinance fast-tracks winery approval process

By Olivia Weitz, February 2, 2016



CALDWELL — Martin Fujishin has seen the Snake River Valley wine region grow from a few wineries along Sunnyslope to a full-blown wine trail, which now includes 14 wineries.

He owns and operates Fujishin Family Cellars and makes wine for Koenig Vineyards, and while overseeing a number of wineries launch, including starting his own, he knows first-hand that starting a winery can be a long and often complicated venture. A new zoning ordinance in Canyon County aims to accelerate the process.

Previously, it was required to schedule a public hearing with the Planning and Zoning Commission to start a winery. The commission also held the authority to approve the winery. A new ordinance that went into effect in January speeds things up by making the public hearing part optional. It also shifts the approval authority from the commission to an administrative director.

In contrast to a vineyard where grapes are grown, a winery is defined as a place where wine production and sales occur.

The ordinance will make it easier for more wineries to enter the market, particularly smaller ones that may not want to build a tasting room right away. Fujishin sees the ordinance as a step forward for Idaho wine.

“Overall, the county has turned a page when it comes to (its) approach to agri-tourism. They’ve decided to be more proactive to see how they can bring more people out here,” Fujishin said.

The city of Caldwell, in particular, has decided to market the Sunnyslope wine trail as part of its updated branding strategy. A new logo released in December features an agricultural image with wine grapes in the foreground. Patricia Nilsson, development services director with Canyon County, says the ordinance will “make a lot of wineries happy.” However, she said, there’s still work to be done to explain the updated ordinance to aspiring wineries.

Since January, the county has been working with one new winery application from Sydney Nederend with Scoria Vineyards. Nederend planted 8.5 acres of Petit Verdot and Malbec on



IDAHO WINE
COMMISSION

WWW.IDAHOWINES.ORG | 821 W STATE STREET, BOISE ID 83702 | 208-332-1538 | INFO@IDAHOWINES.ORG

property near Hells Canyon Winery. The most recent addition to the Sunnyslope wine trail is Parma Ridge Winery.

The Hodges didn't go through the new zoning ordinance process recently passed because they purchased a pre-existing winery that they re-opened last August. They did, however, work with the county on a number of zoning-related matters.

When the Hodges wanted to change a garage on the property that had been used for working on old cars and storing vintage tractors into their tasting room, they contacted the county. The county helped them through the process of switching the space from a private space to a public tasting room.

Because this ended up taking longer than expected due to scheduling and coordinating with the city and a construction staff, the Hodges' main piece of advice for people who want to start a winery: start with the county.

"That's the most important thing: to go to the county and double check with the zoning," Storm Hodge said. "Get everything you need up front, so you're not making change orders in your process later on."

Prior to going through the county, a federal alcohol and tobacco license must be obtained.

Disclosure: Sydney Nederend is the sister of the author of this article.

